

USING QUESTIONS AS A TEACHING TOOL

DESCRIPTION OF SESSION

This session focuses on questions. Well-designed questions are essential tools for teachers. These questions stimulate peer discussion and help students develop understanding of important concepts.

CATEGORY

- Exploring – Social Services
- US DOE - Education and Training

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Explain why it is important for teachers to use effective questions.
- Develop effective questions to support teaching and learning.

SUPPLIES

- Index cards and pen or pencil for each participant

ADVISOR NOTE: Text in italics should be read aloud to participants. As you engage your post in activities each week, please include comments, discussions, and feedback to the group relating to **Character**, **Leadership**, and **Ethics**. These are important attributes that make a difference in the success of youth in the workplace and in life.

ACTIVITIES

Opening Activity

Select an activity from the resources available at <http://www.exploring.org/activity-library/> or conduct a favorite opening activity of your own.

Activity 1

Twenty Questions

With the Explorers, play several rounds of the parlor game Twenty Questions. (The Advisor begins the game by thinking of an object. Explorers will take turns asking up to 20 questions that can be answered with a “yes” or a “no” to try to determine the object. The person who correctly guesses the object thinks of an object for the next round.) After several rounds, ask the Explorers to discuss these additional questions:

- *How did asking questions help you to determine the correct answer?*
- *How were these questions different from the sort of questions a teacher might ask? How are they similar to the sort of questions a teacher might ask?*
- *How are the questions in the game we played different from these reflection questions? (Twenty Questions leads to a specific answer; these reflection questions ask participants to think, analyze, and problem solve.)*

Transition into a brief review of these concepts:

- Questions can help a teacher find out what students know and understand.
- Questions help to guide students’ thinking and learning.
- Questions can be a tool to engage students. When they are involved, they feel more a part of the conversation.

- Questions can be a way to allow students to discover the answers for themselves. This makes the learning more real and personal for them and they will remember the information longer.
- Questions are a way to emphasize what is important in a lesson.
- Questions can be used to start a quality discussion with and among students.
- Questions can help students retain material by requiring them to put the subject into their own words.
- Questions can lead to a specific answer (convergent questions) or to a discussion about possibilities, ideas, and processes (divergent questions).

Activity 2

Effective Questions

Tell Explorers: *The most important part of writing effective questions is to know what you want students to know. Referring to the learning objectives for a lesson is an important starting point.*

Keeping the following in mind can help teachers develop better questions:

- Does this question build on something students already know or understand?
- Does this question help emphasize important ideas students are learning?
- Will this question be a starting point for a class discussion?
- Is the question clear?

Activity 3

Developing Questions

Provide Explorers with five index cards and a pen or pencil. Ask them to develop five questions that would help them find out what they understand about one of the following. (These are from the objectives for this session.)

- Explorers will explain why it is important for teachers to use effective questions.
- Explorers will develop effective questions to support teaching and learning.

Give Explorers a few minutes to create their questions. Then ask them to share their top three. Write these down on a flip chart or white board. Begin a discussion about the different questions and how questions help us to understand what the person being asked the question understands.

ADVISOR NOTE

Some sample questions are below. They are designed to help the participants apply what they have learned to their own interests. You are welcome to use these questions or develop your own questions that relate to your post or specific focus area.

REFLECTION

- *What was the hardest thing about developing questions?*
- *Did writing a good question become easier the more you did it?*
- *Describe three things that questions do for the learning process.*
- *Do you prefer to figure things out yourself or be told the answers? Do you think you learn more or better when you discover an answer for yourself? If you prefer to figure things out for yourself, then wouldn't it be better to let your students figure things out themselves? (If so, allowing them to think for themselves via questions may be a better learning tool than for you to tell them the answers.)*
- *If your question will be a starting point for a class discussion, how will you proceed?*
- *Was your question clear? Were the other questions clear? Or could anything about them be misleading or answered in a way you were not intending?*

- *Could your question or the others' questions be improved? If so, how? Pick a question or two and improve it. (You could potentially concentrate on clarity or focus.)*
- *What did you learn about yourself in this session?*
- *What did you learn from others during this session?*
- *Do you see value in using questions in your teaching? If so, how would you describe their value?*

ADVISOR'S PARTING THOUGHT

The Advisor closes the meeting with a brief message that connects the meeting's activities with the post's area of interest and adds a note of inspiration or a positive challenge.

ADVISOR AND OFFICER REVIEW

After the meeting, address the following:

- Identify what was successful about the meeting.
- Identify what needed improvement.
- Schedule an officer and Advisor planning meeting to prepare for the next post meeting or activity.